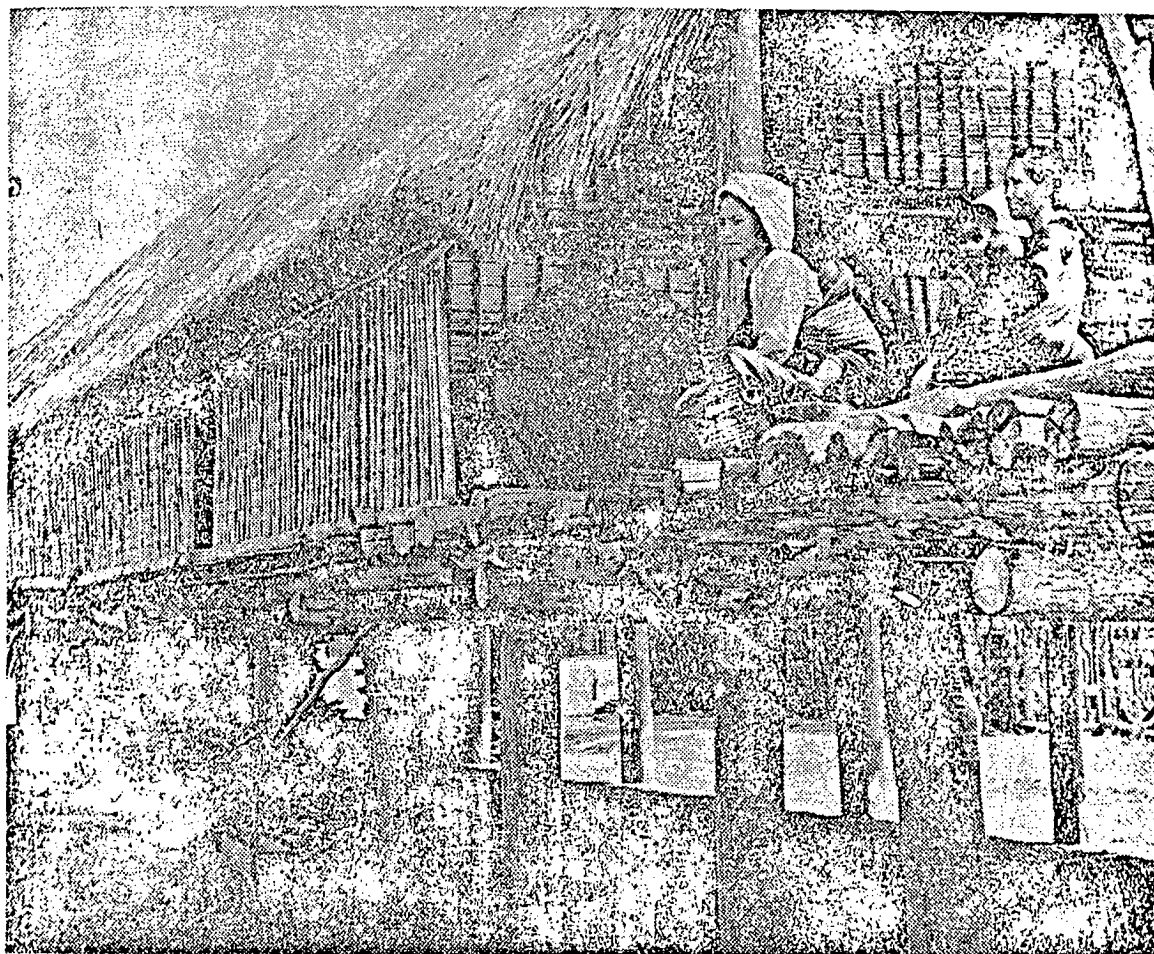


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Copley News Service photo

Rhade women wait for their husbands

Tribes

Little-known natives fight in Viet War

By EDWARD NEILAN, Copley News Service

The helicopter found a clearing in the thick green foliage of the Viet Nam highlands, and eased down, kicking up clouds of red dust.

Two American officers from the helicopter greeted several Montagnard tribesmen who had emerged from the trees.

Another correspondent, on his first trip outside Saigon, pointed to one of the tribesmen who was clad in a loincloth and an old khaki military shirt and said:

"That fellow doesn't even look like a Vietnamese."

The newcomer might have added, with accuracy, that the tough little tribesman didn't

"think" Vietnamese, "feel" Vietnamese or "speak" Vietnamese either.

Strange People

Too often lost in the appraisals of the Viet Nam situation are some basic facts about the people and territory that are found within the convenient boundary lines on the maps labeled "Viet Nam."

One of these often overlooked basic considerations is that Viet Nam is not a nation of Vietnamese. It is a hodgepodge of minorities, a mosaic of ethnic tribes and religious groups that bear little kinship to one another.

Racially non-Vietnamese mountain men, or Montagnards, who make up no more than 5 per cent of the population, inhabit almost 60 per cent of the land area.